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Bill Leslie, Jo Addison, Anna Lucas:  
What Happens Between Us?

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Dear Jo and Anna

Now a year has passed since we got together and spent a couple of hours making and talking I have done a few similar sessions. It strikes me now that perhaps we should not have talked at all. That words can often mask other types of communication and learning. We are too used to using them to justify what we do and the time we spend doing it. I certainly felt nervous inviting those people and felt I had to give them a worthwhile and interesting time and that talking about high-minded ideas and experiences was a way of doing this. Just making together would have been harder, we wouldn't have had words at hand to protect us. Recently it has occurred to me that making together, in silence, creates different types of interaction,

attention and communication and that this for me feels linked to the type of time I spend alone in the studio, communicating with materials and ideas in silence. I've had similar experiences improvising in front of the camera, where everyone's attention is focused upon the activity and there is no need, or no appetite for talking about what you are doing – this would interrupt and spoil the flow. It was interesting talking and hearing about the experiences of the people taking part in our little workshop which were perhaps of a particular feel due to our concentration being split between our eyes and ears and our hands. Especially Yonik who talked about the physical way in which he cuts hair and the relationship that builds between hairdresser and client. It's a shame it was a one off.

There was scope for this to develop into something which could grow out of the group as we got to know one another better. Where would we be now if we continued every month? Perhaps we would naturally have stopped talking after a while as words became less important and we became more comfortable just being together. I think we might have better conversations if we said nothing at all.

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Hi Bill and Jo

Thanks for your summary here, it is nice to re-think what we did in the session and who was there. Actually I don't remember the talking much at all. I remember the cold feeling of the clay when we 'plugged in', and Jo eating clay and making her huge heavy clay glove, which I photographed. I was a bit envious that she actually made something and used the moment so apparently constructively! I think I recognised both of your relationship to clay, and my sense of distance from it. I remember my little patch of blue tarp, my position in the room, the shoes in a pile at the side, the atmosphere of the space. The light coming in high from one side, text on the wall, Harriets long hair. I remember quite enjoying the moment and how precious it

seemed. I cannot recall anything that was said, heard or made. I think the idea of looking/listening/working together in silence is what I mean by 'alongsiding'. How I use the camera to frame a shared moment with others, and how in past work, I have filmed moments of absorption - people involved in a task, and been aware of the charge of that shared moment which is silent because I am filming. I'm aware of how rare those moments have become. I have also set up a few workshops to try and achieve those moments, though not using clay again. Maybe it would be feasible for the three of us to get together and work in silence, for a (very quiet) audio recording maybe, in September, as you suggest.

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Hello both,

I remember I listened to and heard a lot because I prevented myself from speaking by biting the clay. I was exhausted with my own words because I'd been giving assessment feedback for days at work and so I didn't want to say anything. It was such a pleasure not to have to contend with whether, when or how to speak, just to listen to everyone, feel the clay, how smooth it was in my hands and gritty in my mouth. Not long afterwards I was involved in a collaborative performance with a colleague, a writer. We were brought together as strangers and we quickly identified a desire to explore a world without words - in short we performed her testing me on the names of objects, with a potato in my mouth; try it, it's surprisingly

hard and a little bit funny. When we were plotting we talked about how fantastic, dangerous, lazy, romantic, deceptive words can be and recently I was reminded of that when I heard a great story about the german Charles Bliss and his attempt to devise a world of visual symbols that could be shared across the world. His desire to do it arose from an extraordinary relationship with words, which he attributed in part, to his incarceration in a concentration camp and to Nazi mastery of language. Formerly called Karl Blitz, his name even resulted from an incredible semantic collision (released from Dachau and arriving in England when Nazi bombings were named 'blitz' necessitated a speedy change of name).